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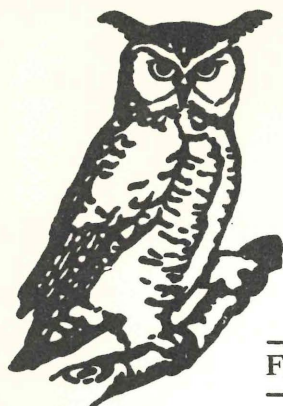
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Naturalist notebook.

# Thoreau's Successor Center

FEB.  
1971





# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

FEBRUARY 1971

VOLUME VII

NO. 2

## FRONT COVER

"FEBRUARY FROST"

-Photo by Bob Dyer

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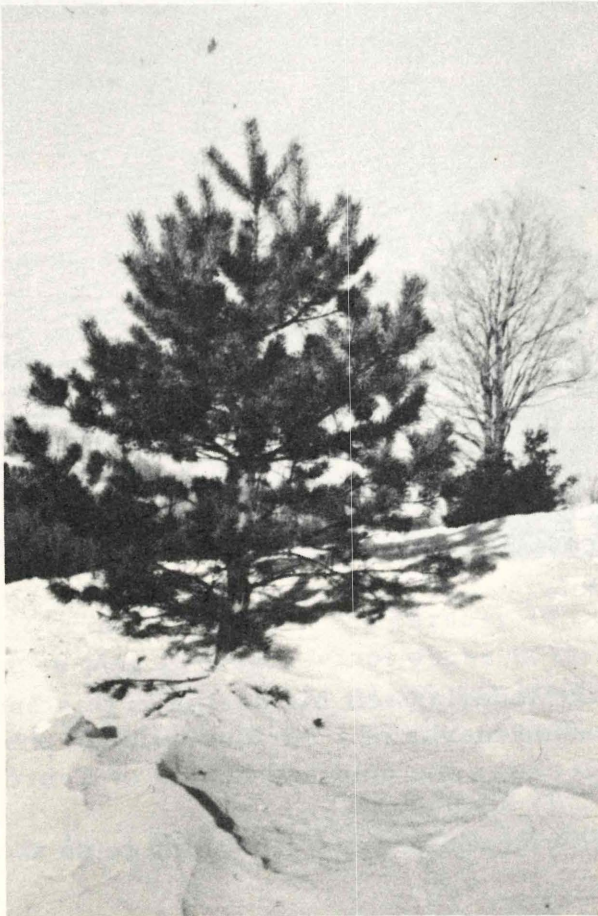
Dr. Richard H. Goodwin



# ***FEBRUARY***

## ***The Month Of Snow Patterns***

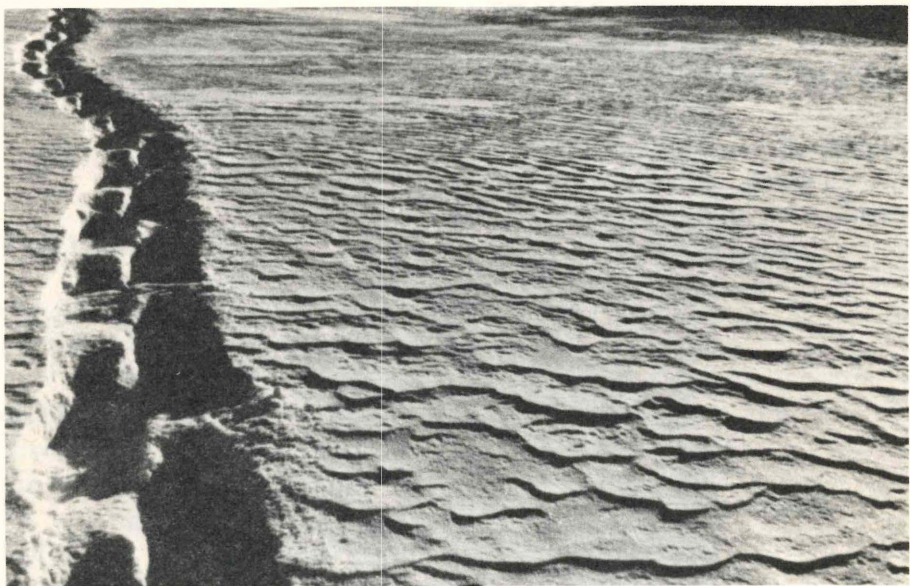
During the month of February when the weather is so unpredictable and many people remain cuddled by the fire in their warm homes, much of nature's beauty goes unnoticed. Why not take your camera or your paints and brushes outside... out to your yard or many miles



*Photo By S. Syz*

away... and capture the eloquent simplicity of a snow drift craddled at the base of a silhouetted tree or a solitary tuft of grass.

Have you ever noticed the pattern of wind and weather's labor... churning each snowflake... shaping each mound... designing each curve. Such patterns depend not only on the wind, but primarily on the amount of water in the snow crystals. The greater the amount of water, the heavier the snow; consequently, there will be less design. Also, the colder the temperature below freezing, the drier the snow will be.



*Photo By S. Svz*

Has Mondrian left his design in this snow? No. It's the snowshoe marks of a curious wildlife photographer who appreciates the cold and beauty of February.

Are you and your family going to do the same?



# THE FEBRUARY CALENDAR

FEBRUARY IS THE MONTH OF UNPREDICTABLE WEATHER AND STILL FORESTS.

February 2... Ground Hog Day.

February 8... Look for small flocks of Brant along coastal waters.

February 10... The Full Snow Moon... a total LUNAR ECLIPSE. The penumbral stage begins at 2:53 a.m. The maximum eclipse may be seen at 3:45 a.m. and it will end at 5:38 a.m. (See page 7 for more details concerning the lunar eclipse.)

February 11... Long-eared Owls may be roosting in pine groves.

February 12... Lincoln's birthday.

February 14... Valentine's Day.

February 17... Great Horned Owls are beginning to nest. Listen for pre-dawn and dusk hooting.

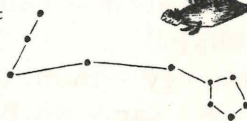
February 15... Washington's birthday is celebrated on this day rather than the 22nd.

February 20... Tides are lowest of the year on this date.

February 25... Red-necked Grebes arrive along the coast. They are larger than the Horned Grebe and have a yellow bill.

February 27... Courtship of ducks is fairly common. Look for head bobbing and aerial chases.

February 28... The sun doesn't set until 5:32.



# ALONG THE SHORE

by BARBARA KASHANSKI

## "LITTLE FISHES"

Where have all the young fish  
gone?

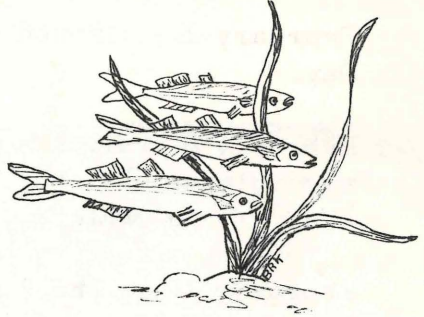
Over the waters and through  
the channels

To feed in the marsh they go.  
Blackfish, Butterfish, Weak-  
fish, Flatfish,

Puffers, Gobies, Silversides,  
Sticklebacks,

Filefish, Lumpfish, Sculpies,  
Toadfish...

- Little, little fish -



Why? Why have all the young  
fish gone-

Gone to the marsh to feed?

What's so great about a  
marsh?

FOOD - food that all the  
little fish need.

Plankton and nutrients in with  
the high tide-

Nutrients and plankton out  
with the low tide

- Changing - Nourishing -

Where did you go? ... Out.

What did you do? ... Filled in a marsh.

DON'T - don't fill in the marsh!

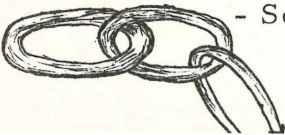
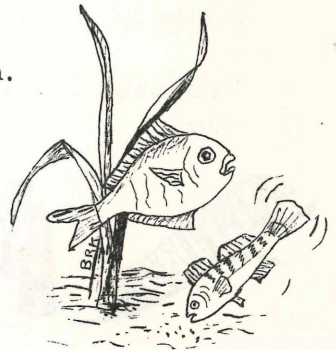
You'll kill all the little fish!

No little fish, no big fish!

Now you've done it - You've broken  
the chain!

No more energy - them to us...

- So Sad - So Bad -





# An Introduction to Pollution

by Stephan Syz

## MAD HATTERS ALL?

Today we are discovering that the mercury that has for years been used to extract ore in mining, in industrial processing, in seed coating fungicides and in paints, is poured into the seas and is reappearing inside animals in even the most remote areas of the planet. Mercury is being found in fish such as tuna and swordfish, in seals and in birds.

Although it has not been established with certainty, it has been postulated that the metallic mercury enters rivers from industries, mining, and in some states from decaying river bank retaining logs that once were mercury impregnated to retard decay. The rivers enter the sea where bacteria convert mercury into methyl mercury. This organic compound is taken in by plankton and becomes more concentrated as larger and larger marine animals eat one another.

There is little agreement as to the safe level of mercury for people. It is known, though, that it is lethal in food that contains 100 parts per million (ppm) and the World Health Organization considers .05 ppm safe while the FDA considers .5 ppm safe. (The FDA has indicated that grocery tuna with even somewhat higher concentrations can be considered to be safe.)

In Homo sapiens, chronic mercury poisoning effects mouth parts, nerves and causes emotional disturbance. At one time, some members of this species working in hat factories where felt was treated with mercury became severely emotionally disturbed. Thus, the origin of the term "the Mad Hatter." Hopefully, our knowledge of the effects of mercury in the past will prevent the coining of such words in the future. As this publication goes to press, the news expresses concern for fish-eating dieters who, with further dieting liberate the stored mercury in their fat, thus increasing its concentration in the blood. Would "daffy dieters" be too outrageous?

# HEADS UP !

*by Robert L. Dyer*

## THE SKY AT NIGHT

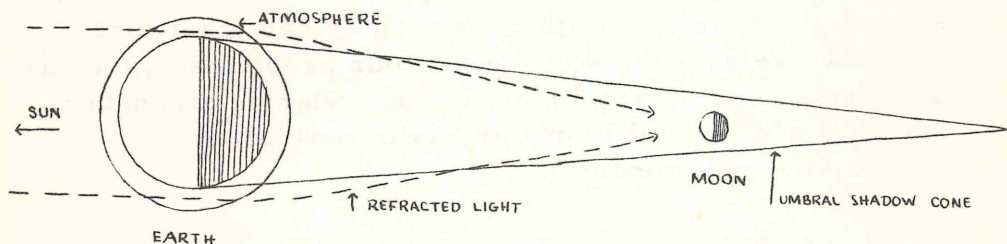
Did you know that practically anyone can be an astronomer? "Nonsense," you say. "Too technical; I'm no scientist, and besides I need expensive and fancy equipment, don't I?" No, not really. Astronomy can be as easy and simple, or as difficult and complicated as you want to make it. Anyone, including yourself, can observe the rising and setting of the sun and the moon. Did you realize that the amateur astronomer can contribute to the science of astronomy in many ways? He can watch meteors, for example. As many of our readers know, meteors and "shooting stars" are the same thing. Our earth is being bombarded each minute by literally thousands of meteors which are no more than tiny particles of matter that are in orbit about the sun. If one of these speeding projectiles enters the earth's atmosphere, it is heated to incandescence in a fraction of a second and disintegrates in a brief flash of light... a shooting star. On any night of the year you can see about six to eight meteors in an hour's observation; however, on certain nights the rate may rise to twenty or seventy, and rarely over one hundred an hour. When this happens, the earth is intersecting the orbit of a swarm of meteors and a so-called meteor shower is visible at that time. How can meteor watching add to our knowledge? If one watches regularly and records the location, direction, color and brightness of each meteor seen, he will be adding to astronomical science. This is a task well-suited to the amateur, and for which the professional has little time.

Another way amateurs provide valuable information to the professional astronomer is by observing variable stars, or those stars which change their brightness. Admittedly, this is getting into the more sophisticated end of amateur astronomy, but many variable star observers have no more equipment than a watch, binoculars and star map.



It's not really necessary to contribute to science in order to enjoy astronomy; everybody can watch the parade of the planets across the sky, see the phases of the moon change from night to night, trace the pattern of the constellations in the sky and observe eclipses of the sun or moon. By the way, before dawn on February 10 (see the February Calendar, p. 3) you will have a good chance to observe a total eclipse of the moon (providing a good reason to get out of bed in the very early a. m. ) Oddly enough, no two lunar eclipses are alike. Sometimes when the moon passes into the earth's shadow it is colored a bright coppery orange, while during other eclipses it may become nearly invisible in the sky. This coloration, or lack of it, results from the refracting or bending of the sun's rays by the earth's atmosphere. Changes in brightness from one eclipse to the next depend upon how much refracted light reaches the moon. If it is very cloudy in the twilight zone of Earth, then little light can pass, resulting in a very dark eclipse of the moon. A clear twilight zone permits easy passage of refracted light and the result is a fairly bright eclipse... usually of the coppery variety, although occasionally deep brick red and even blue eclipses have been noted. Incidentally, unlike an eclipse of the sun, a lunar eclipse requires no precautions for the protection of the eyes and may be safely observed.

If you understand the diagram, you will realize that a total lunar eclipse can only occur at full moon. Likewise, a lunar eclipse is visible from an entire hemisphere of the earth at one time. The February 10th eclipse will be visible in western Europe, northwest Africa, North and South America and eastern Pacific regions. This is the only lunar eclipse visible in the United States in 1971.



# ARTICLES OF ADULT INTEREST



We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook . . . . Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible . . . .

ROBERT L. DYER ARRIVES: Our new Naturalist comes from Wheeling, West Virginia, and is a graduate of West Liberty State College with a B.S. in biology. An outstanding birder, Bob worked toward his master's degree in zoology at Arizona State and was granted a National Science Foundation Fellowship for one year in a doctorate program at the University of Montana. Bob has been a teaching and research assistant at the University and was assistant naturalist for Oglebay Institute in Wheeling. Bob also has a good knowledge of astronomy, works well with children and is an experienced photographer. The Center welcomes Bob, his wife, Mary Kay, and their daughter, Amy.

FRIENDS OF THE CENTER: Mrs. John Crosby Brown and Mrs. Edward P. Williams have renewed their Friend of Thames Science Center memberships, and Dr. Marion H. Hamilton has also become a friend.

BOOK OF THE MONTH: The Quality of Life by James A. Michener, published by J. B. Lippincott. In an eloquent statement of his own faith in our American traditions, Michener relates the solutions of our problems, especially preserving our environment, to the enduring strength, stability and flexibility of our basic institutions and values. We recommend it.



#### THERE WILL BE NO MORE BIRD SEED DELIVERIES:

Because the volume of seed sales and deliveries has greatly increased this winter, and due to mileage and time involved delivering seeds, we can no longer continue this service.

**BIRD FEEDERS HAVE ARRIVED AND OUR STORE IS BEGINNING TO OPERATE:** Although our supply of bird feeders and suet bags is adequate, the remainder of the store is simple. We hope to have a complete line of scientific books and supplies in the near future. Members of the Thames Science Center will receive a 10% discount on store items, but we must add a 5% sales tax. A 5% sales tax must also be charged on bird seed.

**ADULT VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED TO LEAD FIELD TRIPS:** Especially in the spring, TSC receives many, many calls requesting guided tours for school groups, scout troops, etc. In the past, we have often had to turn down some of these requests due to a lack of well-qualified, volunteer leaders. Such trips are taken to the Arboretum, to the Peace Sanctuary Nature Preserve in Mystic, to Stone Acre Dairy Farm in Stonington, and along the shore at Harkness Park. If you are interested in leading such trips, you will be fully trained and allowed to "tag along" on other trips before we request that you lead one yourself. Please call the Center at 443-4295 if you are interested.

**FIRST ANNUAL GIVING:** At press time, we have received approximately \$3000 in donations. As the Thames Science Center depends on private donations to carry on its activities, maintain the museum, publish a newsletter and actively support the preservation and care of our natural resources, we need your help. Won't you please send your donation too?

**THE SCIENCE CENTER WILL BE OPEN ON SATURDAYS:** Beginning this month, regular Saturday hours will be from 9 to 5. The same hours will be in effect during the week, but we are closed on Sundays.

# **FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK**

*By Robert S. Treal*

Originally Bluff Point was purchased by the State of Connecticut to be developed as a park and beach for the public. The key to this development by the highway department has been a major roadway and huge parking facility to be constructed on this narrow strip of state land to accommodate the large number of park users. Such a proposal would destroy a unique and untouched stretch of New England coastline.

On Thursday, January 14, the Center sponsored a Workshop on the politics of ecology using Bluff Point as a case study. Mrs. Mary A. Martin, State Representative 65th District (D), Mr. Sanford T. Meech, conservationist, and Mrs. Constance Thurston, member of the Groton Planning Commission, led the discussion after a slide presentation of the Point. The color slides, taken during the fall, quickly revealed the striking beauty of this wilderness and its uniqueness in being situated in such a densely populated area. The discussion ranged over ways of saving the Point with strong feeling that ideally it should be left alone in its natural state. Yet, everyone realized such a dream is not possible and that some development is inevitable.

The Workshop ended with two specific courses of action open to those interested in saving as much as possible of Bluff Point. First, those who have ideas or proposals are encouraged to make these known to any of the three panel members; and second, those who wish to serve on a possible committee for a sensible development of Bluff Point, should contact the Center. We look forward to your support.



# CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

## 1970

In 1900, under the direction of Dr. Frank Chapman, the National Audubon Society initiated the Christmas Bird Census at Englewood, New Jersey. Since then, the count has spread to various areas throughout the country. In each area, only the finest birders are individually picked to identify and count birds in the field.

The 21st annual New London Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 27. On a cold, clear day, 30 field "birders" covered the 15-mile diameter area from Mason's Island, west to Rocky Neck Park and north to Bartlett's Cove in Uncasville.

In addition to the field census, there were a total of forty feeder reports (fifteen lower than last year.)

The day resulted in a total of 101 species, listed below. A \* indicates a new high-number recorded this year. A \*\* indicates the one bird recorded for the first time on the Christmas Count.

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>ALL TIME</u>
Common Loon	5	24
Red-throated Loon	7	12
Red-necked Grebe	1	5
Horned Grebe	73	298
Pied-billed Grebe	*25	13
Great Cormorant	*192	80
Great Blue Heron	41	41
Black-crowned Night Heron	6	20
Mute Swan	167	249
Canada Goose	429	481
Snow Goose	5	8
Mallard	1103	1180

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>ALL TIME HIGH</u>
Black Duck	1164	1707
Gadwall	1	5
Baldpate	*273	260
Wood Duck	*3	2
Redhead	3	8
Canvasback	224	738
Greater Scaup	1197	5358
Common Goldeneye	206	821
Bufflehead	360	949
Oldsquaw	7	18
Common Eider	5	56
White-winged Scoter	1	79
Surf Scoter	17	57
Common Scoter	4	33
Hooded Merganser	115	180
Common Merganser	28	158
Red-breasted Merganser	320	3207
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	2
Cooper's Hawk	1	2
Red-tailed Hawk	*8	5
Rough-legged Hawk	1	3
Sparrow Hawk	9	15
Ruffed Grouse	3	5
Bobwhite	11	77
Ring-necked Pheasant	5	20
Virginia Rail	*2	1
Coot	48	169
Killdeer	*14	10
Black-bellied Plover	*10	5
Ruddy Turnstone	17	20
Purple Sandpiper	34	139
Dunlin	3	8
Black-backed Gull	*212	176
Herring Gull	5252	5728
Ring-billed Gull	191	290
Bonaparte's Gull	26	49
Mourning Dove	293	478



<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>ALL TIME HIGH</u>
Belted Kingfisher	20	20
Flicker	12	34
Hairy Woodpecker	28	33
Downy Woodpecker	91	97
Horned Lark	7	48
Blue Jay	*671	500
Common Crow	321	353
Black-capped Chickadee	493	576
Tufted Titmouse	146	159
White-breasted Nuthatch	*103	88
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	15
Brown Creeper	*11	8
Winter Wren	1	3
Mockingbird	*23	14
Catbird	7	7
Brown Thrasher	19	20
Robin	42	66
Hermit Thrush	2	9
Swainson's Thrush	1	1
Bluebird	9	35
Golden-crowned Kinglet	8	8
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	3	9
Water Pipit	*17	15
Loggerhead Shrike	*2	1
Starling	*6114	4912
Myrtle Warbler	16	168
Yellowthroat	**1	--
House Sparrow	693	895
Meadowlark	51	99
Red-winged Blackbird	139	201
Baltimore Oriole	1	1
Rusty Blackbird	15	175
Common Grackle	*776	500
Cowbird	2357	2406
Cardinal	131	208
Evening Grosbeak	2	740
Dickcissel	1	2
Purple Finch	47	141

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>ALL TIME HIGH</u>
House Finch	144	152
Pine Siskin	1	159
Goldfinch	42	234
Eastern Towhee	73	87
Savannah Sparrow	20	50
Vesper Sparrow	*20	3
Slate-colored Junco	424	697
Tree Sparrow	235	394
Field Sparrow	91	94
White-throated Sparrow	189	317
Fox Sparrow	35	75
Swamp Sparrow	9	12
Song Sparrow	218	275
Snow Bunting	34	61

TOTAL SPECIES	101
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS:	26,040

This year's count was headed by Bob Dewire, T. S. C. 's former Naturalist, who contributed the above information and who plans to continue organizing the New London count in future years.

Thanks Bob!

Most of the field birders who participated in the Christmas Count are members of the New London County Bird Clud, and enthusiastic group that encourages an active interest in the study of birds and collects ornithological data.

To become a member, mail \$2.00 to Mrs. Malcolm MacGregor, Wamphassuc Point, RFD 1, Stonington, Conn. 06378. This small fee will cover mailing to keep you informed of scheduled bird walks. The next trip on March 14 will be along the R. I. shoreline. An active spring schedule will be confirmed in March.

This group is also responsible for the "Rare Bird Alert" in which you may also participated at your request.



# FIELD NOTES

December 15 - January 15

Although this time of year is generally unexciting to wildlife enthusiasts, the last few weeks have proved quite the contrary for us.

Niantic, Waterford, New London: SKUNK CABBAGE was growing already, in a stream near Oil Mill Road in Waterford. It was first sighted on Jan. 5. EVENING GROS-BEAKS were first reported from the vicinity of Harkness Park on Dec. 17 and from Old Colchester Road in Quaker Hill on Dec. 20. Also from Quaker Hill on Raymond Hill Road was our only report of a DICKCISSEL on Dec. 22 and a RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH was reported from the same feeder. An unusual winter visitor, a female BALTIMORE ORIOLE, was at a feeder on Dec. 28 and remained until Jan. 6 in mid-Niantic town despite the heavy New Year's snow storms. Jan. 3 brought more "summer" residents to our wintery shore. . . 5 pairs of MEADOWLARKS were seen near Seaside Regional Center in Waterford and a lone one was again sighted on Jan. 11 at Harkness. A BROWN THRASHER has been feeding at Woodsea Place since mid-December and a HERMIT THRUSH was sighted in Waterford on Jan. 3 and again on the 4th. At Harkness on Jan. 4, there was one AMERICAN BITTERN and in Jordon Cove an OLDSQUAW was sighted on the same date. A RED-SHOULDERED HAWK was sighted at Waterford Beach Park on Jan. 4 and at Green Harbor Beach off of Pequot Ave. in New London was a KILLDEER and 75 to 100 AMERICAN WIDGEON. Four GADWALLS were also seen on the 4th in Ailwise Cove. A KESTREL was seen along the shore on Pequot Ave. on Jan. 6 and another was seen at Harkness on Jan. 8. On Jan. 9 a SNOWY OWL was seen on property at New Shore Road in Waterford. A male WOOD DUCK was sighted at Harkness marsh on Jan. 11 and a male SHOVELER visited Orient Point on the 11th. One KILLDEER and a SURF SCOTER were also seen there. A male REDHEAD was feeding in the Thames River near Smith Cove on Jan. 12.

Old Saybrook, Lyme, and East Hampton: At Haddam Neck in East Hampton, a RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER was sighted on Dec. 21, and on Fenwood Grove Road in Old Saybrook, a YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT was sighted on Dec. 28...a very unusual visitor for a cold, snowy day!

Groton, Mystic, Stonington: Four deer swam across the Mystic River and entered the Peace Sanctuary on Dec. 19. One COMMON LOON and a COMMON MERGANSER were sighted along the shore in Stonington. BLACK DUCKS and HOODED MERGANSERS have been seen courting in the Mystic River as early as Jan. 2. GREAT BLUE HERONS are wintering at Groton Long Point and one makes his home on the Mystic River in the Peace Sanctuary. Seven to twelve CANADA GEESE are also seen regularly on the Mystic River, and on the evening of Jan. 5, one adult and one immature BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON were visiting Starr Street in Mystic. A COMMON MERGANSER is an irregular visitor on the Mystic River.

Contributors to this column were: Grace Bissell, Barbara Bonanno, Martha Capizzano, Bob Dyer, Mr. and Mrs. William Fetske, Warren Fish, Trudy Gardner, Barbara Kashanski, Mrs. Mary Kish, Margaret McGregor, Mrs. John Merrill, Mrs. Hope Morse. Mrs. Enders Richards, Mr. Oscar Seaholm, Mr. William Sihler and Craig Vine.

#### RARE BIRD ALERT

On Monday, January 11, the Thames Science Center was notified by Dr. James A. Slater and Dr. John P. McDonald of the University of Connecticut at Storrs, that they had sighted a TUFTED DUCK near Smith Cove in Quaker Hill. After many vain attempts by several birders, TSC's new naturalist, Bob Dyer, spotted the bird on the afternoon of Jan. 13 among thousands of Scaup and Canvas-backs feeding at the north side of Mamacoke Hill on the west side of the Thames River near Smith Cove.

The duck has a tufted, iridescent, dark blue head and a pale blue bill with a black tip and a single white ring. The chest and back are black and its sides are pure white. It also has a white wing stripe, but this is only obvious when the bird flies.



# *ACTIVITIES FOR FEBRUARY*

Thursdays...REMINDER...7:30 P.M. "Identification of Rocks and Minerals Workshop"

Saturday, February 6...10:00 A.M. at the Science Center. Film for Junior Members, grades 1-6, "The Living Desert." One hour, fifteen minutes. Free. No Registration.

Saturday, February 6...10:00 A.M. "Signs of Wildlife, Wilderness Bushwhack" on Dolbia Hill Farm in East Haddam with Dr. Richard H. Goodwin, Botany Department, Connecticut College. Bring lunch and wear foot gear for tramping in the snow. Coffee will be served. Meet at Salem 4-corners where Route 85 intersects Route 82.

Sunday, February 21...3:00 P.M. Lyman Allyn Museum Auditorium. Family film, Walt Disney's "White Wilderness." One hour, thirteen minutes. Members free. Nonmembers, 50¢ donation.

Friday, February 19 to Sunday, the 21st...REMINDER  
...Snowshoeing in the White Mountains. Registrants meet at 5:00 P.M. on Friday at the Science Center.

Saturday, February 27...10:00 A.M. Junior Members' Workshop, Grades 4-6. "Leaf Designs With Contact Photography" Registration required. Limit 15 children.

# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

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MARTHA M. CAPIZZANO  
*Editor*

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